APPENDIX 8

RANGELAND HEALTH: FUNDAMENTALS AND STANDARDS, ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Introduction

In America's West, rangelands are the dominant landscape. Sometimes overlooked and under-appreciated, rangelands contribute significantly to the quality of life of residents and visitors alike. BLM's 200 million + acres of rangeland have long been valued for livestock grazing and mining, but rangelands now are also prized for their recreation opportunities, wildlife habitats, watershed, cultural values, and scenery.

During the western migration of the mid and late 1800s, rangelands attracted settlers who wanted to build a new life of ranching, farming, business, and mining. As settlement continued, competition for land and water intensified. Land was put to uses that were not sustainable over the long term, and insufficient thought was given to future needs.

With time, competing interests have changed and intensified. Over the past 125 years, significant public values have been placed at risk. Irreplaceable topsoil has been lost, habitats are diminished, and clean water supplies are coming into question. A new focus is emerging from this continuing uncertainty, one that looks at sustainability of ecosystems rather than production of commodities. The land itself is in jeopardy, and the variety of products and values that this land has produced may not be sustained for future generations of Americans unless ecosystems are healthy and productive.

It is time for a change, and BLM is changing to meet the challenge. BLM is now giving management priority to maintaining functioning ecosystems. This simply means that the needs of the land and its living and nonliving components (soil, air, water, flora, and fauna) are to be considered first. Only when ecosystems are functioning properly can the consumptive, economic, political, and spiritual needs of man be attained in a sustainable way. To achieve these ends, BLM has developed the following Fundamentals of Rangeland Health and their companion rules-Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management for BLM Lands in Utah.

Fundamentals of Rangeland Health

As provided by regulations, developed by the Secretary of the Interior on February 22, 1995, the following conditions must exist on BLM Lands:

(a) Watersheds are in, or making significant progress toward, properly functioning physical condition, including their upland, riparian-wetland, and aquatic components; soil and plant conditions support infiltration, soil moisture storage, and the release of water that are in balance with climate and landform and maintain or improve water quality, water quantity, and timing and duration of flow.

(b) Ecological processes, including the hydrologic cycle, nutrient cycle, and energy flow, are maintained, or there is significant progress toward their attainment, in order to support healthy biotic populations and communities.

(c) Water quality complies with State water quality standards and achieves, or is making significant progress toward achieving established BLM management objectives such as meeting wildlife needs.

(d) Habitats are, or are making significant progress toward being, restored or maintained for Federal threatened and endangered species, Federal Proposed, Federal candidate, other special status species, native species, and for economically valuable game species and livestock.

Standards for Rangeland Health

Standard 1. Upland soils exhibit permeability and infiltration rates that sustain or improve site productivity, considering the soil type, climate, and landform.

As indicated by:

a) Sufficient cover and litter to protect the soil surface from excessive water and wind erosion, promote infiltration, detain surface flow, and retard soil moisture loss by evaporation.

b) The absence of indicators of excessive erosion such as rills, soil pedestals, and actively eroding gullies.

c) The appropriate amount, type, and distribution of vegetation reflecting the presence of (1) the Desired Plant Community [DPC], where identified in a land use plan conforming to these Standards, or (2) where the DPC is not identified, a community that equally sustains the desired level of productivity and properly functioning ecological processes.

Standard 2. Riparian and wetland areas are in properly functioning condition. Stream channel morphology and functions are appropriate to soil type, climate and landform.

As indicated by:

a) Streambank vegetation consisting of, or showing a trend toward, species with root masses capable of withstanding high streamflow events, vegetative cover adequate to protect stream banks and dissipate streamflow energy associated with high-water flows, protect against accelerated erosion, capture sediment, and provide for groundwater recharge.

b) Vegetation reflecting: Desired Plant Community, maintenance of riparian and wetland soil moisture characteristics, diverse age structure and composition, high

vigor, large woody debris when site potential allows, and providing food, cover and other habitat needs for dependent animal species.

c) Re-vegetating point bars, lateral stream movement associated with natural sinuosity, channel width, depth, pool frequency and roughness appropriate to landscape position.

d) Active floodplain.

Standard 3. Desired species, including native, threatened, endangered, and special-status species, are maintained at a level appropriate for the site and species involved.

As indicated by:

a) Frequency, diversity, density, age classes, and productivity of desired native species necessary to ensure reproductive capability and survival.

b) Habitats connected at a level to enhance species survival.

c) Native species reoccupy habitat niches and voids caused by disturbances unless management objectives call for introduction or maintenance of non-native species.

d) Habitats for threatened, endangered, and special-status species managed to provide for recovery and move species toward de-listing.

e) Appropriate amount, type, and distribution of vegetation reflecting the presence of (1) the Desired Plant Community [DPC], where identified in a land use plan conforming to these Standards, or (2) where the DPC is identified, a community that equally sustains the desired level of productivity and properly functioning ecological processes.

Standard 4. BLM will apply and comply with water quality standards established by the State of Utah (R.317-2) and the Federal Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water Acts. Activities on BLM lands will fully support the designated beneficial uses described in the Utah Water Quality Standards (R.317-2) for surface and groundwater. 1

As indicated by:

a) Measurement of nutrient loads, total dissolved solids, chemical constituents, fecal coliform, water temperature and other water quality parameters.

b) Macro-invertebrate communities that indicate water quality meets aquatic objectives.